UC-NRLF
B 3 120 207

ADMETVS

A THESSALIAN FANTASY

BY IRVING E. OVTCALT

THE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LIBRARY

For out of olde feldes as men seith
Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yere
And out of olde bokes in good feith
Cometh al this newe science that men lere

EX LIBRIS
WM·DALLAM ARMES

COPYRIGHT 1914
BY
IRVING E. OUTCALT

For the right to perform "Admetus," application should be made to Irving E. Outcalt, State Normal School, San Diego, California.

Compliments of
Irving E. Outcalt

ADMETUS
A THESSALIAN FANTASY

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

By

IRVING E. OUTCALT

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

AURORA

NOTE

This play was written for outdoor presentation by the class of June, 1914, of the State Normal School at San Diego, California. Since the Ionic portico and colonnades of the Normal School building were to be the stage and setting for the play, a Greek theme which should give opportunity for Greek costumes and pageantry seemed appropriate.

The selection of the cast, the work of preparation, and the stage production were directed by Miss Jane Butt, Instructor in Oral Expression and Dramatics. All departments of the school assisted in preparing the details,—music, costumes, dances, stage properties, etc.,—and the entire school, students and faculty, participated in the pageantry.

The Choruses were sung by the Normal School Philomel Chorus, under the direction of Miss Rose E. Judson, Head of the Department of Music. Mrs. Margie Louise Webber, of San Diego, sang the solo in the fourth act. Mr. Ernest L. Owen directed the orchestra.

395517

The music of the choruses, "O The Day is a Loom," "The Day is Coming," "Life so Fair," and "The Day is Gone," and of the solo, "From Some Far World Above," was composed by Mr. S. Camillo Engel, of San Diego, who on this occasion played the accompaniments to his own compositions. Since then, Mr. Engel has composed music for the other choruses given in the lines, and also an overture, the necessary processionals and interludes, and the postlude,—in short, he has now provided a complete cycle of music for the play.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

ADMETUS, ----------King of Pheræ
ALKESTIS, ----------the Queen
EURYNOME, --------companion to the Queen
PALÆMON, ----------Priest of Apollo
ZETHUS, ----------an old peasant
HERMES, ----------the messenger God
APOLLO, ----------the Sun-God
HERACLES, ----------the friend

Aurora, Phosphor, Hesper, the Hours, the Graces, the Muses, Ceres and Persephone with nymphs and swains, Bacchus and Ariadne with attendant revelers, and the Winds.

The royal children, heralds, cup-bearer, attendants, soldiers, altar maidens, handmaidens, and citizens.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE FIRST DAY

King Admetus of Pherae enjoys the special favor of Apollo. The reason for this is that when Admetus was a youthful hero, the great sun-god, having offended Zeus, was condemned to exile from Olympus, and spent nine years as a shepherd to the king of Pherae. He learned how rich and beautiful human life can be, and especially came to love Admetus. After he returned to Olympus he remembered the land of Pherae with the richest blessings that he could bestow, and cherished the design of conferring Olympian immortality upon the king; not understanding that the characteristic joys as well as the sorrows of earth grow out of the mortal condition. Admetus, responding to the favor of the god, has given himself up more and more wholly to piety; and his beautiful wife, Alkestis, with her warm human affections and her ready human helpfulness, has apparently become less and less necessary to his life. Only apparently, however.

Now the annual harvest festival in honor of Apollo is being celebrated. The queen, as she observes the increasing asceticism of Admetus, cannot help recalling his heroic youth, when he won the games from all the other sons of Greece, sued for her hand, and then came for her, driving the team of wild boars and lions that the oracle had prescribed.

For the first time, Palaemon, the old priest, detects omens of evil attending the sacrifices. The king is oblivious to these—so perfect is his reliance upon divine favor. The priest, whose human sympathies are strong in spite of his divine calling, is surprised to find that his own concern is for Alkestis. Admetus is almost ready to forswear the joys of earth, if he can but gain immortality. Only his deep love for Alkestis, now almost hidden under pious observances, still holds him from Olympus.

The coming of Heracles, the much-loved helper of mankind, is announced.

Act I

SCENE: The portico of the temple of Apollo in Pherae. It is the day of the harvest festival in honor of Apollo as the god of the harvest. The worshipers come, bearing offerings of ripened grain and fruit, which they heap about the altar that stands in the foreground, or take into the temple. They pass in and out, and the portico is well filled when Admetus and Alkestis, with Eurynome and other attendants, come to give royal sanction to the joyful occasion. The king, almost priest-like in his bearing, salutes the temple with uplifted arms; then he invokes the favor of the god.

Admetus Unto Apollo, on this festal day,
The harvest of our lives we offer—nay!
Are these *our* lives that wake to greet the sun,
That sing while reaping till the harvest's done,
Then feed upon the fatness he hath given,
And sleep secure beneath his shadowed heaven?
Not so! His flocks that Hermes tends on high,
Whose golden fleeces rich the evening sky;
The winds that blow his music thro' the groves,
Dispelling from the valleys that he loves
All earthborn mischiefs, wheresoever found,
In noisome vapor or unhallowed sound;
The health and joy and sweetness of the days
Wherein we walk along his lighted ways—
All these are not more his, to heed his call,
Than we, from throned king to meanest thrall,
Are his—Apollo's. Whence the songs we sing,
Today? the solemn dance, wherewith we bring

The hecatombs from herds that by his will
Now graze and multiply on every hill
Throughout our realm? O Phœbus, all are thine—
The herdsman and the herd, the grape, the wine,
The kingdom and the king, the harvest day
And all the harvest. Thou, to whom we pray,
Art author of our prayer. Above our hope,
About our lives,—yea, compassing the scope
Of our deep joys and griefs,—thou art: thy love
Hath left no emptiness below, above.
And since it fills our hearts and sets us free,
We grace ourselves in turning unto thee!
As fountains overflow and find their sea,
As birds give up in song the joys that fill
Their tender throats too full, as the stars spill
Back on thy luminous throne the light that thou
Hast given too freely,—so thy people now
Must render back the bounty of the land.
And *ours* is but the trembling of the hand
That holds the offering forth. Take thou our best:
O Phœbus, take thine own, and we are doubly blest!

(*Admetus goes into the temple, leaving Alkestis, with Eurynome and the other worshipers, in the portico.*)

Alkestis

The king goes in. 'Tis meet that on this day
The chosen of the gods should seek the shrine
Alone.—Eurynome, dost thou not think
Such piety sits well in Pheræ's court?

Eurynome

It graces both Apollo and the king.
Never was king so favored of a god
As is our good Admetus!

Alk. 'Tis not strange:
Never was king so open to the skies
As is Admetus.

Eur. He was always so.

Alk. Always? Yea, truly! Yet—I know not why—
Sometimes my heart is thrilled by memories
As of Admetus in another guise.—
Less pious?—Nay!—But with each sacrifice
To Phœbus,—O the many hecatombs!—
Thou knowest, Eurynome, for thou hast been
Beside me always,—somehow stranger grows
The image that I cherish from the past.
Shall I forget Admetus as he came
First to my father's court, and won the games,
And took the wreath from all the sons of Greece?
Less pious? Why, Admetus was himself
A god on that great day! The worshiper
Was I, earthborn, that scarce could lift my eyes
To my Olympus!

(She remains thoughtful, reminiscent. Palaemon enters from the temple. His face and manner show anxiety, as from some untoward occurrence.)

Eur. On the sun's great day,
Why should the sun's priest wear a cloudy brow?
Where is the king?

Palaemon He lingers at the shrine,
Where he most loves to be. 'Tis well: the god
May speak to him directly. Light the work
Of priest is, when the king's ear is so close
To the god's lips!

(Alkestis turns and observes Palaemon.)

Alk. When the priest's mien is grave,
On this of all days, in a land so blest,
A queen must wonder—nothing more?

Pal. The priest
Must solve the wonder,—if it please the god
To give him light!

Alk. How went the sacrifices?

Pal. Well—and ill.

Alk. How ill? In Pheræ's land,
What can impede the prayer of Pheræ's king?
What can divert the blessing of Apollo?—
Or may a god grow weary of his love?

Pal.
The love of Phœbus changes not, be sure!

Alk.
Then nought can harm Admetus or his realm.

Pal.
Even to the priest, Apollo's oracle
Is sometimes doubtful.—Human is the priest,
And human hope and fear may mix within
His heart, and then the Olympian light grows dim.

Alk. A riddle!

Pal. Then I speak it as I see!
Call it the riddling of an old man's fear,—
But in the temple on this day, methought

The air was somehow heavy with portent—
Yet was there nothing.—Blue and wavering
The sacred flame—but what of that? These eyes
May be less true, even in Apollo's light,
Than when Apollo's Hours were kindlier.—
Less keenly did my spirit seem to feel,
Today, the presence of the god—a veil,
Invisible but chill, had intervened.—
What then? May not the spirit's channels fill
With dregs of wasting years? And when I turned
To supplicate the chariot-throne, a cloud,
Heavy with omen, had shut out the skies.—
But what of that? No cloud can make the sun
Less sure!

Alk. What power can harm Admetus, if
Apollo change not? Is the king disturbed?

Pal.

He sees no omens—knows no evil: safe
He lives within the bosom of the god.
He scarce would hear the voices of the Fates!

Alk.

The Fates! True, there are Fates; but we who dwell
In Pheræ's favored land regard them not.

Pal.

Would that they gave as little heed to us!

(*Palaemon goes out.*)

Alk.

He told us all—nothing that we should fear,
If the king fear not. Timid grows the priest

With age.—Yet there are Fates, and he who stands
Within the circle of the gods may well
Take counsel of his fear.—Admetus *fear?*
Why should Admetus fear? He is a man—
No less than when he wooed me! Eurynome,
Canst thou recall the wonder of the day—
The day long ere I came to dwell within
These walls, which love hath made my only home—
The day when first Admetus came?

Eur. Aye, well!
The glory of Admetus on that day
Flows thro' the charmed memory like a song!

(She recites. The throng responds with the cry, "Admetus!" at the end of each stave. Alkestis listens with growing fervor, as the youthful triumph of her hero is recalled to her.)

When the best and the bravest had striven,
While the splendor of Hellas looked on,
And Olympian murmurs came down, wind-driven,
To mingle with earthly applause;
From the press of the day's great cause
Came forth, at last, to the foot of the throne,
The victor, alone—
One hero came forth at the last high call,
One hero, to harvest the glory of all—
"Admetus! Admetus!"

Then the stillness of that great hour
Closed round, like a starlit sky:
Forgotten his right arm's unconquered power,
And the quick, fierce will to die.
Beyond the deep moment's ken
The struggles, the victories, fade;
And the wrecks his prowess hath made,

The world—the world and its men
Are lost in the leap of a spirit flame,
    At the sound of his name—
        "Admetus! Admetus!"

Like the flash of sword from its sheath
    Is the joy of the young heart now;
For the white-haird king leans forth with a wreath
    That is meet for a victor's brow.
O, the games have been played and won,
And the glorious striving is done!
    Is there aught beyond for a hero, then,
Who is tried and ready? Ah, might we behold
The vision of youth unrolled—
The gleaming world and the path of gold!
    But the silence is shattered again—
        "Admetus! Admetus!"

And more than a world is there;
    For the eyes of the hero have flown
To the eyes of the maiden, where
    She stands by her father's throne.
O Eros, while trumpets sound,
Thou makest thy silent victory sure;
For the brave and proud, like the tender and pure,
    Must yield when thine arrow flies!
    Now the hero's lips are pale,
And the wreath falls to the ground,
    And the glorious visions fail.—
Doth he hear, while the sound of his triumph rings,
How the heart of the maiden sings?
        "Admetus! Admetus!"

Alk.

Aye, how it sang! As if to fill the void
With music fresh as motherhood's first joy!—
The king returns—but not yet hath he ceased
Communing with the god. Is this Admetus,
Whose royal heart once quelled the savage team
Of boars and lions? He, whose passion's tide
Swept round me, as the ocean-stream the world?
For I was like a little isle, adrift
Upon a summer flood,—like Delos, I,
Before distraught Latona's prayer called down
The word of Zeus that fixed it in midsea,
As a divine abode where love divine
Might be fulfilled—and Phœbus bless the day!

(Admetus enters from the temple. He is thoughtful, rapt, almost ascetic in his bearing. Alkestis regards him with wistful inquiry. He extends his arm toward her, benignantly. She obeys and they walk together to their places, while the handmaidens, courtiers, and other Pheraeans take positions at either side.)

Adm.

On days like this the god himself would come
To greet us here! Canst thou remember?

Alk. Dissembling. I
Remember one whose coming brought the dawn,
And crimsoned peak and sea!

Adm. Surprised at her fervor. Dawn of his day
It was—whose but Apollo's! Yet who markt
The glory thro' his humble garb? How strange
That man may see the god indeed, then turn
To sordid mortal things again! 'Tis true—
The god once walked these fields,—in shepherd guise,
Yet none the less a god,—and we were blind,

Seeing the shepherd only! Yet we soon
Perceived that wheresoe'er he came, our hearts
Had wondrous power o'er song and beauty. Then
In pure simplicity I made him king
Over the flocks that graze! And little guessed
That I was but a shepherd in his world.

Alk. Thou his shepherd?

Adm. Aye, all things are his,
And we are his,—

Alk. *Hurriedly.* Aye, so you said, my lord.

Adm.
Why, even thou, Alkestis, art his gift—
The richest of Apollo's gifts to me!

Alk.
His gift, my lord? A gift should have no heart!
(*She rises abruptly.*)
Music, Eurynome! Honor the day
With dance and song!

Eur. *To the chorus of worshipers.*
Come, sing we of the day,
And of the God of Day!

Chorus sings
O, the Day is a loom where the God doth weave,
A wondrous loom is the Day!
And the gleaming web is the life we leave,
It gleams with our work and play.
The flash of the shuttle, the quick return—

Doth the weaver smile as he sees?
We may love and hold, we may love and mourn;
But what doth the weaver please?

O, the Day is a harp to the God's swift hand.
A wondrous harp is the Day!
Its tones are the noises of sea and land,
And strange is the harper's lay.
From the God's swift hand fly the sweet wild chords—
From the God's swift hand they fly!
O, the music we love, but we know not the words
That he sings as he passes by!

(Admetus has been struck by the inadvertent regret in the words and manner of Alkestis, and thro' his really deep affection for her half divines what is in her mind. His habitual joy in the near vision of her beauty, and in the realization of her nobility and of her love for himself and their children, gradually brings back all his natural tenderness.)

Adm. Alkestis, hast thou found the secret well
Of youth undying? Every day more fair
Thou art. The gods are doubly kind: the days
Bring flowers to thee—take none away!

Alk. I live,
My lord, and love my life and thee, and all
Thy gifts—and every gift of Phœbus.

(Palaemon and an attendant enter.)

Attendant. A messenger begs leave to greet the king
I left him waiting at the palace door.

Adm. Let him come hither.

(He dismisses Alkestis affectionately, and with her all depart excepting Admetus, Palaemon and a few attendants.)

Now the sacred day
Must lose its purport in the petty round
Of a king's toil. Palæmon, one more word,
Before yon messenger lets in the world.
Thou art beloved of Phœbus: thou alone
Dost know how ardently my spirit craves
To do the will of Phœbus; since the day
When, walking with a god upon these hills,
I caught the hope that earth might mix with heaven,
And man grow to Olympian stature, if
His will might lose itself within the god's!

Pal.

O king, thy piety is known to all. Enough
Thou hast prevailed. No man may challenge Fate!

Adm.

Why should man speak of Fate? The gods themselves
Are helpless in the surge of that vast will,
That sways from pole to pole! To think of *that*
Is to be lost! Fate cannot speak to us—
Heeds not our cries. The gods are friendlier,
Nearer akin: they beckon from Olympus,
And draw us upward.

Pal. But this world is fair,
Friendlier than Olympus—

Adm. What, Palæmon, thou?
Hath the man in thee overcome the priest?

Pal.

Right, O king! Thou'rt nearer to Apollo

Than is Apollo's priest.—For one whose heart
Is with the gods, this world indeed hath little:
Wouldst yield it all?

Adm. Aye, for one upward step!

Pal.
There hast thou pleged the price that man must pay!

Adm.
This world the price that man must pay, to gain
Olympus? Gladly would I pay it then!
The most that gods will give should be the least
That man aspires to. What is paid and left
behind—is nothing!

Pal. *Aside* Then alas, Alkestis!

(*The messenger enters.*)

Messenger
To Pheræ's hospitable court I bear
The greeting of a friend, Alcmene's son.

Adm.
What? Heracles? A blessed name! Where is
Thy master?

Messenger
Even now he comes this way,
On Thracian labor for Eurystheus bent.
To-morrow shalt thou see him, if thou wilt:
He craves thy hospitality awhile.

Adm.

No better word could come to Pheræ's court!
A happy herald thou! Go on before—
Bear welcome to the mighty son of Zeus!
Tell him our happiness awaits his coming.

All go out.

THE SECOND DAY

Palaemon, the old priest, bearing the shepherd's staff that has once been Apollo's, comes in early morn to the field where the god himself formerly tended the flocks, there to seek a closer communion with the divinity of his worship. He is opprest by the sense of coming evil, and his concern is still for Alkestis. About him, tho he does not know it, are all the beautiful divinities of the dawn; for it is their office to herald the god of day on his westward journey. Apollo himself is tarrying in these fields, as is his wont, recalling the joys of his former humble life in exile. He meets Hermes, messenger of gods and Fates, and learns that the death of Admetus has been decreed. He must save his favorite, somehow. He sends Hermes to bargain with the Fates. Then, to intensify the zeal of Palaemon and purge it of all human weakness, he reveals himself in full splendor to the priest, who thenceforth will be blind to all earthly things and will see only the splendor of the god. Hermes returns with the word that the Fates will grant a respite to Admetus, if some other worthy soul will go, a willing ransom for him, at the appointed hour. Heracles bears the stricken priest home to Pherae.

THE DANCE OF THE HOURS

Act II

SCENE: A field in Thessaly, near Pherae. In the background is a rude altar to Apollo, to whom this field is sacred on account of his service as a shepherd.

(The Chorus of the Dawn enters: First the Winds and the Hours; then Aurora, Phosphor, the Graces, the Muses, and other associates of Apollo; Bacchus with revelers, Ceres with attendant nymphs and swains. They are heralding the God of Day. Scenery, costumes, and spirit are appropriate to the dawn.)

Chorus

The Day is coming! Phœbus, lord, hath spoken!
The huntress' bow is slack, her arrows fail.
The Day is coming! Dawn's sweet dream is broken,
And rosy fingers glimmer thro' the veil.
The Day is coming! O'er the gray Aegean
The petals kindle in the orient rose;
And now the flame hath touched the hills Eubœan,
And thro' the Muses' haunts the glory grows!

The Day is coming! O'er the western ocean
The mists are flying—chastened is the air.
The forest gloom is stirred with strange emotion,
And one by one lays all its secrets bare.
The Day is come! Behold the blazing portal!
O man, stand up! To thee 'tis given for aye
To look with eyes that die on light immortal—
Behold the chariot-throne! The God! The Day!

(As the song closes, Palaemon and Zethus, an old peasant, enter. The priest seats himself upon a rock and is soon lost in contemplation of the rising dawn. The shepherd's staff, which he handles with so much reverence, is the one that was formerly borne by Apollo himself, in this field. Old Zethus is carrying rocks and building a wall. Occasionally he regards Palaemon with evident scorn, and even interrupts his pious meditations, until the old priest is exasperated.

Here and throughout the act the mortals who participate are unconscious of the divine presences, excepting when made aware by special act of Apollo.)

Zethus

Now, now, Palæmon! Thou art old enough to do thy sleeping in bed. This is no place for such as thou. (*He shakes the priest, who resents the intrusion.*) What? Not asleep? Why, if thou wert young, thou might'st be in love! He, he, he! In love, old Palæmon! Dost know what love is, or art thou too old even to remember? He, he, he!

(Chuckling over his joke, he resumes his work, and Palaemon his contemplation of the dawn. The divine chorus is before him, but he sees only the changing radiance of the morning.)

Palaemon

The morn comes pulsing, glowing, from the dusk!
Here in Apollo's field, at break of day,
I come, as is my wont, that so my heart
May deeply drink the presence of the god.
I feel within my hand his herdsman's staff
Draw me unto him with familiar touch;
I seem to see about me beauteous forms—
Fresh as the dewy flowers with which they blend—
Of those who grace his chariot-course, or bear
His heraldings to every life that waits
To be enkindled. Aye, the god is here!
The doubts and fears that haunt the night, when eyes
Are helpless, now should flee!

Zet. Talking of a god—he, he! Wake up, Palæmon! Belike 'tis the same god whose priest thou art! Palæmon a priest—old Palæmon—he, he! Fit for such a god! Why, that Apollo used to sit on that same rock and moon away the time, just as thou dost! What kind of a god can he be, that was too silly to herd sheep? Yet *he* was young enough to be in love. Wake up, old Palæmon—he, he!

(*He goes back to his work, chuckling derisively.*)

Pal. Unheeding
The god is here;
Yet, in defiance of his presence, yea,
Even of his panoply of morning, comes
That gloomy portent, seeking me. Some harm
Awaits the royal household, I am sure.
Alas, Alkestis! Why do I think of her?
Apollo's charge to me is of the king.

Zet. Aye, that Apollo: he was a madcap youth. A shepherd, he? Why, he would sit where thou dost now, holding to his lips a piece of wood that sang "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo" —he, he, he ,he, he! "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo," it sang, like a silly bird! He a god? Thou a priest? He, he, he! (*He shakes Palaemon.*)

Pal. Away, clown, keep thy ribaldry for thy kind!

Zet. Retreating, yet oblivious to Palaemon's anger. "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo," it sang, like a silly bird! (*He goes out.*)

Pal.
Darkness and light—how strange! The twain
must mix
Daily before our eyes at dawn and eve.
Forever must the life we know emerge

From the mysterious flux of day and night.
Forever must we see the world anew
Created out of chaos with the morn.
Of gifts divine, this is the crowning one—
That we should see the Titan struggle forth,
Daily, from out the black abyss! —Alas,
Alkestis!

(*He gives himself up to silent reverie.*)

Chorus

Out of the orient glow and pass!
Hang with jewels each blade of grass.—
Shepherd or priest, peasant or king—
Into his heart of Olympus sing.
Dazzle his eyes with Aurora's tears;
Trouble his spirit with hopes and fears;
Then pick up the jewels, every one,—
And hasten—we herald the passing sun!

(*Hermes enters.*)

Hermes

Ho, ho! Thessalian fields have captured
Great Apollo's court of beauty!
Pheræ's swains I see enraptured,
While a god delays his duty.

Chorus

Why, 'tis Hermes, he who wanders
Widely, gods and men deriding.—

Hermes

When the mighty sun-god squanders
Daylight, there is cause for chiding.

Goes your lord once more a-wooing,
While the west awaits the morn?—
All forgot, his late undoing,
When he won Marpessa's scorn?

Ho, I saw the great Apollo,
When that fairest maid of earth
Fled the god's embrace, to follow
Idas to his humble hearth!

Ho, ho! Be the warning shouted
To Olympians who rove,
"If a god would not be flouted,
Let him seek no earthly love!"

Chorus

Hermes, scoffing at thy betters,—
By thy scorn thou art betrayed;
For the master-love that fetters
Phoebus is not love of maid.

Here, where mocking thou dost greet us,
Wait we, while our lord, apart,
Blesses all that King Admetus
Holds within his pious heart.

For with every day's renewing,
Lingers he to please his eyes—
All the humble scenes reviewing,
Where he wrought in mortal guise.

See, he comes!

(*Apollo enters, slowly, as if reviewing every feature of a landscape that is rich in associations. Hermes and the chorus fall back.*)

Apollo

Once more, O earth, from lucid heights descending,
I greet the shadows of these homely hills;
I see the groves, and hear their music blending
With sounds from fields that humble labor tills.
How fresh the song that bursts the seals of morning!
How glows the light, where late the darkness lay!
How brave the toil, how brave the smile—death-scorning!
The air how kindly, where these mortals stray!

Olympian bastions blaze with light eternal:
The gods go forth, return, and all is said;
While earth enfolds the mystery supernal
Of light and darkness—of the quick and dead.
Here night or day stands, now remote and single,
As each in beauty braves the lonely deep;
Anon, in twilight, their faint breathings mingle,
And folded wings their mutual secret keep!

Chorus

A garden blooms in the dusk alway,
'Neath the stars that circle the realm of day.
(Like the rose-lighted dusk of a maiden's hair,
'Neath the eyes of love, is that garden fair.)
And by golden pathways that Time hath worn,
The gods come down to the brink of the morn:
They breathe the fragrance of blossoms rare,
That glow and fade in the starlight there;
Then dreaming they mount to Olympus high,
And drown their wonder in revelry.

(*Hermes discovers himself to Apollo.*)

Hermes What now? Must the warrior descend from his chariot? Must the archer follow his arrows? Must the god measure his steps by those of men?

Apo. Hermes, the mocker! And pray, who wanders more than Hermes? Lately more than ever! When was Hermes present at a council of the gods?

Hermes *With a grimace.* Council, indeed! A dozen all-wise, all-powerful beings, with nothing at hand to tax either wisdom or power, sit about the banquet and tax Ganymede to protect them from drouth!

Apo. *Sympathetically.* No wonder Hermes prefers to be a messenger—or even a cattle-stealer.

Hermes *Bowing ironically.* Your memory is good! Yes, I fear that somehow I was born with a taste that is thrown away among Olympians.

Apo. Credit Father Zeus for that: he is himself overtaken sometimes by the mood for wandering. But in sober truth, Hermes, Olympus hath need of thee. Father Zeus is gloomy of late, while Hera is very cheerful. Thou knowest how tedious the conditions must be for others. The latest adventure of Hermes, told as only Hermes can tell it, would be most welcome entertainment.

Hermes *Again ironically.* The graceful compliment is not lost. But the gloom of Zeus and the good cheer of his consort must spring from one and the same source. Is that source known?

Apo. Who should know if not thyself? I wait to be enlightened.

Hermes Belike our brother Heracles is sweating—or bleeding—under the exactions of his taskmaster, Eurystheus; and at every drop the queen of heaven smiles, while Zeus winces and stores up wrath for the future. The hero will come this way, anon: he loves Admetus as a brother.

Apo. For that I the more readily forgive him the wrong he did me once at Delphi. Whoever loves Admetus is Apollo's friend.

Hermes *Significantly.* Let those who love Admetus help him—if they can.

Apo. *Sharply.* What may those words portend?

Hermes What can thy love avail, if it cannot teach thee what is in store for the man thou lovest?

Apo. Thou knowest the unvarying law, Hermes: No god may read the future of the mortal whom he loves. It is the penalty that we must pay. Thou alone knowest all the decrees of Fate.

Hermes That is no mystery. Hermes loves no one—is incapable of love. His mind is as limpid as the ether which is his home and his highway. He knows no toil, because he recognizes no impediment; no distance, for his wings are never weary: no time—what can an immortal know of time, save as a rumor from mortality? Thou hast thyself trusted him with this wand, that from it he may shake wealth, for which he

knows no use; happiness, which concerns him not; dreams, since he never sleeps. —

Apo. *Impatiently.* But Admetus! What of Admetus?

Hermes *Unheeding.* The decrees of gods and of Fates are alike to Hermes, since he hath nothing at venture; hence are all decrees known to him as they unfold, and he is their messenger elect. Grim Tartarus, whose very name throws a shadow across the Olympian revels, has no terrors for Hermes; and he alone may pass the gloomy gates unscathed.

Apo. Admetus, Hermes! What of Admetus?

Hermes *Willing to vex Apollo.* And this death, which to others seems the one black flower of a beautiful earth, is to Hermes as the lapping of waves on a seashore; hence is he the bearer of the mortal summons, and his is the hand that leads the reluctant spirit downward thro' the thickening shadows. Would Hermes be capable of these offices, if he were subject to grief or anger or love? Could such a one shoot spiteful arrows at the children of Niobe, or vengeful ones at a cyclops? Or could he mope in the path of a loved one, or sigh to a tree or a flower, or wear wreaths of remembrance?

Apo. Admetus, Hermes! Will nothing stop thee? What of Admetus?

Hermes Hermes sees men and gods and Fates alike, and is capable only of laughter! He sets his wits at service, waves his wand, or touches the air with his wings—the deed is done, and he laughs—ho, ho! And, now, since a brother's mind is clouded by a mortal affection, Hermes will prove his quality, saying to thee, "For all thou art the mighty sun-god, Phœbus, thou soon shalt lose thy friend!"

Apo. Admetus? Lose Admetus?

Hermes The word is already spoken by the Fates. Ere thou lead a second morning to these hills, I am to lead the spirit of Admetus—thither (*pointing downward*).

Apo. It cannot be!

Hermes It cannot be! Ho, ho! (*derisively*)

Apo. My will is otherwise!

Hermes Thy will is otherwise! Ho, ho!

Apo. Admetus is to be immortal—is to dwell with the gods! I have willed it: Zeus hath consented.

Hermes Thus do the Olympians dance about bravely on the outstretched palm of Fate!

Apo. But this must stop! My vows are given: they must be fulfilled. Hermes, thou shalt help me. Try those tireless wings once more; and since thou knowest not time, go down, ere it is too late, and greet the fatal sisters for me. Bid them name their price: Admetus must be mine! The love I bear him was born and nurtured in these fields, and hath a richer taste than anything divine—a flavor of the earth. I will not lose it. Bid them name their price! Thou wilt go, Hermes?

Hermes To go and to stay are alike to me. To serve thee, I go. Await me here.

Apo. Here, without fail!

(*Hermes hastens away.*)

Now to this priest; for he must yield to me
The last red drop of service. Ho, Palæmon!
His human eye shall not discern me yet;
But ere I leave him he shall know his god.
His zeal hath flagged of late.—Palæmon, ho!
Palæmon!

(*The priest rouses himself wonderingly from his reverie.*)

Pal. What? It is the god's own voice!

(*He prostrates himself.*)

O Phœbus, art thou here? Declare thy will!

Apo. Palæmon, priest of Phœbus, where is he?

Pal.

Let not the god be angry: he is here—
Thy priest, Palæmon! Never more thy priest
Than now.

Apo. Why lifts he not his voice in prayer?
Is wisdom whole with him, or can it be
That here in Thessaly no need cries out
Which Phœbus can supply?

Pal. *On his knees.* Thy voice is gracious!
Dare I give words to that which fills my heart—
To fear that strives to shape itself in prayer?
May a man speak of such, and not presume?

Apo.

The *priest* presumes, who falters in his prayer!

Pal. Then, Phœbus, be not wroth! I pray for one,
Above whose head I see a portent hang,—
Alkestis, dear to thee and to this realm
And to Admetus, since that far-off day,
When with thy aid, Admetus sued for her,
And brought her with him to this favored land.
A tender, gracious consort hath she been—
A mother loving, wise—all Thessaly
Is fragrant with her virtues—

(*Apollo has deen listening with growing impatience, and now interrupts.*)

Apo. What is this?
Hast thou forgot thy charge?

Pal. *Prostrating himself.* Nay, pardon!

Apo. *With growing wrath.* What!
Hast thou forgot the king and all his hope?
Where now is thine allegiance? With the queen,
Whose soul sees nought beyond this sordid life?
Whose every power exerts itself within
The narrow circle of an earthly home?
What thinks she of Olympus? Hath her heart
Hungered for aught beyond her hearth?
Art thou
A priest?—Apollo's priest?—establisht here
To feed the yearnings of Admetus' soul
For immortality—to free his heart
From every gross affection? Thou a priest?—
Apollo's priest?—now praying for the queen,
Whose love is the last fetter that impedes
His upward flight? The love thou bear'st the king—
Why hath it not ere now revealed to thee
The peril of the king?

Pal. His peril? *His?*
O, pardon!

Apo. Time it is that thou must know
The God to whom thy vows are consecrated!
Rise, priest—behold Apollo!
(*He reveals himself in full splendor.*)

He that sees,
As now thou seest, the god of day—his eyes
Shall see nought else again thro' all his days.
The splendor of the god shall fill his soul
Thenceforth, and may not be disturbed!

Pal. *Spreading his arms in fearful joy.* To me!
The splendor of the god! To me! At last!

(*Palaemon falls back, blind and unconscious. As Apollo regards him, the chorus performs a rhythmic measure about his prostrate form, singing. Hermes returns, and at a gesture from Apollo touches the priest with the caduceus, which has power over sleep and dreams.*)

Chorus

Seal his eyes:
Daylight dies—
Brief is the vision of seas and skies.
Hastes the gloom,
Gapes the tomb—
Swift are the deed and the doom!

Phœbus, he lies on thy hallowed ground:
Now make him surely thine.
Wide thro' his spirit the Pæan sound—
Thrill him with joy divine.

Auroru Comes the blithe morning to smile for him,
Turning the shadows to rose;
Hours Come the glad Hours to beguile for him
Time that so tardily flows;
Muses Come the rapt Muses to sing to him
Songs of the heavenly spheres;
Graces Come the fair Graces to bring to him
Blossoms that fade not with years.
Weave we the circle around and around,
In a changeless stream;
When he awakes from his deep, deep swound,
Life will seem
But a passing gleam,
In an immortal dream.

Hermes *In his former derisive tone.* How very becoming anger is to a god!

Apo. No mocking now, Hermes! Yet thy gibes should trouble no one. Thou hast judged thyself: thou art a messenger,—no more,—knowing not the weight of what thou bearest, seeing nothing that thou seemest to see.—Who comes here?

(*Old Zethus enters, discovers Palaemon, and tries in vain to rouse him.*)

Zet. Palæmon! What, Palæmon! Art dead? Nay, there is still breath here. Yet his eyes look strange. Palæmon, Palæmon! Can the old man sleep so, with his face to the sun? (*He tries to drag the body away, but is not strong enough.*) I must seek help: he must not lie so, in the sun. (*He goes out.*

Apo. But what say the Fates? What is their price?

Hermes A high one: they grant thee respite for Admetus; but at the appointed hour to-morrow I am to lead to them another worthy soul as a ransom.

Apo. They might have demanded two! How came they to be so gracious?

Hermes But the ransom must be a willing one.

Apo. H'm—that will be more difficult; these foolish mortals are strangely enamored of their petty lives. But it will be contrived. The king hath many lovers in his land, and he himself is resolute for immortality. And yet, may I count upon him? Humanity hath vagaries more strange even than love of its unstable life. What means that silly choice of Marpessa? And how was Palæmon so easily seduced from his charge? But the priest is secure, now. When he awakes he will know nothing but my will, and will see nothing but the splendor of Phœbus. I can trust him. Let us go.

(At Apollo's signal the chorus goes out before, singing.)

Chorus

Out of the orient glow and pass!
Hang with jewels each blade of grass.
Shepherd or priest, peasant or king—
Into his heart of Olympus sing;
Dazzle his eyes with Aurora's tears;
Trouble his spirit with hopes and fears;
Then pick up the jewels, every one,
And hasten—we herald the passing sun!

(As Apollo and Hermes are about to depart, they see old Zethus returning with Heracles.)

Hermes Here comes a brother! He will undo thy work.

Apo. Heracles—with the lionskin! Let him not perceive us. How his might hath grown under his hard taskmaster! Nay, he will not mar my work, nor I his: our purposes are to nearly akin. But let us observe him.

(Heracles pauses to look about, then strides forward until he bends over the prostrate form of Palaemon.

Heracles Is this the man I am to help?

Zet. *Breathless.* Heu, what a stride thou hast! 'Twould wind Achilles the swift-footed! Palæmon! Thou sleepest well, old man! Is he dead, think you? Alack, there will be some weeping, if the good king and queen hear that he is dead. I left him here but a moment—mooning away, as is his wont in the morning. He was a good man, but old, very old—not what he was once. Alack, we shall all grow old!

Heracles He is not dead, nor is he in pain. The sun hath toucht his eyeballs—those arrows of Phœbus are keen. He will awaken, but he will not see.

Zet. Not see? Why then he will be blind! Palæmon blind? Impossible! Why, how can he keep a flock, or lead a procession on a feast day? He could not lead himself—he, he! Palæmon blind? No, no, that cannot be! What, wilt thou carry him?

Heracles How sound is his sleep! Some lofty power hath a hand in this. *(He looks about, suspecting a superhuman presence.)* Yes, old man, I'll bear him home. The shoulders that once carried a lion's carcass into the court of Eurystheus will make a light burden of this beloved priest. He shall be surety for my welcome.

(He lifts Palaemon to his shoulders—Zethus trying to help—and strides away.)

Zet. *Chuckling.* A lion's carcass! A brave jest—he, he! A lion's carcass once, now old Palæmon! Palæmon a lion's carcass—he, he!

(*He goes out.*)

Hermes Tomorrow I shall summon the spirit of Admetus. If he be not ready, he must find ransom. Is it understood?

Apo. Thanks for thy courtesy! Admetus will not go with thee.

(*They go out.*)

THE THIRD DAY

The pious ecstasy of King Admetus is heightened by the story which blind Palaemon tells him of the vision of Apollo. The priest is now truly and wholly the spokesman of the god, and is ready with the divine message. Admetus shall enjoy immortality, if only his will is equal to the breaking of all the ties of earth. As the priest departs, Alkestis enters. Her quick human sympathy, awakened by the old man's affliction, leads now to a revelation of the wide difference in interest that has developed between the king and the queen: his concern is with the god, hers is with human things—the works of the god. His pious raptures baffle her, tho' she scarcely knows how. Then Hermes comes, bearing the fatal summons to Admetus, who is overcome by the catastrophe. Alkestis takes up the asphodel in his place. She leaves without revealing her purpose. The king, with health and vigor returned, now tries to find the substitute required by the Fates, but is soon informed that one has been found within his household. While he is recounting these things to Heracles, the sound of the wailing of mourners approaches, and then comes the announcement of the death of the queen. Heracles

readily perceives what has taken place, and Admetus, more slowly, realizes that even a woman might satisfy the requirement of the Fates. He is overcome with grief, and is led away, as the chorus of mourners comes in. Heracles, filled with compassion, determines that Alkestis must be recovered from death.

Act III

SCENE: Within the palace of King Admetus.

(The king and Palaemon, who is blind, enter with attendants. Admetus is evidently absorbed in contemplation of the experience which the priest has just been recounting to him.)

Admetus Hast thou told all, Palæmon? Turn thy face
This way again.—Those eyes have spent their power
In one fierce moment's joy; that so their god,
At height of glory, might possess thy soul
Forever.

Palaemon O my king, thou think'st it much
That I should lose my sight. In truth, the price
Was nothing, and already is forgotten.
What are a season's blossoms, when the walls
Of time and place are lost in one dread flash,
And the vast sea from which all beauty flows—
From which those flowers were painfully distilled—
Comes, flooding all the spirit?

Adm. I have walked
Side by side with Apollo in those fields:
He was an exile from Olympus, then,
And shunned all semblance of the god. To me
He made himself a man. Nine years I knew him—
Yet knew him not as god; nine years I felt
His spirit somehow quicken mine to life

The blood could not keep pace with. Thro' his heart
A vigor seemed to flow, from secret wells
Too deep for me to fathom. Thou art blest,
Since thou hast seen him as he is.

Pal. And yet
In this old body was the vision poured,
And when this body dies, the vision dies.
Blest am I, King Admetus, for a day,
Since I have seen that high, imperious brow
Bidding the dayspring flow eternally!

Adm.
Thy king would share thy blindness, could he share
Thy vision.

Pal. Nay, my vision is but mine!
Whilst thou, O king shalt sit among the gods,
Beside the fountains of all streams that flow!
Where I but taste, there shalt thou drink thy fill!—
Thou art astonisht?

Adm. Thou hast named my hope!
With what assurance? Hath Apollo's wand,
In Hermes hand, been prompter of my dreams?
And hath Apollo's love, with purpose, fed
That fond, presumptuous hope within my heart?
And comest thou, Apollo's priest, with his
Authority new-sealed upon thine eyes,
To change that hope to substance?

Pal. Even so.
Apollo's love hath placed immortal life
Within thy reach: put forth thy hand and take it.

Adm.

Put forth my hand?

Pal. The gods force not the gift
Of immortality on any man.
'Tis in thy will to take or to reject.

Adm.

The gods are wise; yet why consult my will?
My will is in Apollo's, as thou knowest.

Pal.

Thy will is *thine*, Admetus—dost thou pause?

Adm.

Surprised I am that something in myself
Bids me withhold my hand and think. I know
That the immortal hope, so dominant
Within me, hath been strangely checkt, ere now,
By promptings from this human life. My realm
Is fair to look upon—its fields and flocks,
Its homes, the life that humbly ebbs and flows
As wills the king. My sons and daughters, now
Fast blooming into life, draw me to them
By dawning gifts and graces; and my queen,—
Alkestis, ready ever with her hand
And heart, and by her natural joy in life
Making life sweeter to all things that live—
Why should I shun the lot of these, who all
Go smiling toward the dim, mysterious door,
That opens once for each—and not again?

Pal.

Aye, but Admetus—

Adm. Pardon me, O priest!
I know that these are light and trivial things—
Lighter than thistle-down to one whose eyes
Burn with the image of the very god!
I set them forth, as I would bare my soul
Before Apollo. Then I say, with thee,
Earth is akin to heaven: man's highest hope
Should scale Olympus. He must not refuse
To pay the earthly cost of bliss divine!

Pal.
Alkestis comes!

Adm. How canst thou know?

Pal. *Hurriedly.* Her step!
Farewell, O king!—I must not speak with her,
Lest I regret my eyes!—Nor man nor god
May hope to make clear to a woman's mind
The lofty intercourse 'twixt god and man!
Farewell: the gods have chosen thee, O king!

Adm.
Farewell, Palæmon. (*To the attendant.*) Lead him
gently down.

(*Alkestis enters, followed by Eurynome. She recognizes Palaemon, who is being led out, opposite.*)

Alkestis Palæmon? Ah, the poor old man! Alas!
The tale of his disaster even now
Hath reacht my ears. What? Is he blind indeed?
An old man should not gaze into the sun:
His vital fluid is too easily

Drunk up. Is there no help?—no liniment
In all our store,—no poultice that my hands
Could make, to cool the fever? None? Then all
Our simples and our healing art are vain,
Against the darts of Phœbus,—Phœbus, god
Of healing, who hath taught us all we know!
Persuade him to come back and let us try.—
He was a priest of Phœbus!—To be blind—
No more to see the dew upon the grass,
The ripple of the wind across the trees
And meadows, or the flocks among the herbage,
Or smile of human friendliness—no more?
Why, these are Phœbus' works!—Mine own eyes weep,
That his should be distraught,—and he so old,
So few days left for seeing, at the best!

Adm.

Alkestis, spare thy pity. Tears become
Thy woman's eyes, but here are spent in vain.
Palæmon needs no pity: he hath seen
His god; and is more blest, since Phœbus wills
That he shall see nought else.

Alk. May a god, then
Be jealous of his works? A mystery!

Adm. *Aside.* Right, Palæmon! (*To Alkestis, severely*) The
gods have not made clear
Their ways—to woman's comprehension. *She*
May lead her life secure, and question not.

Alk. A blessing, truly!—Pardon me, my lord;
'Tis thou hast made it such, for me, my lord.

(*She pauses, wondering how best to make herself understood.*)

I saw thee first as victor in the games,
And knew thee as the hero of all Greece—
My hero!

Adm. Nay, Alkestis, 'twas the god
That nerved my arm unto that victory.

Alk. *More eagerly.* Let it be so; but I saw thee, my lord!
I knew thee next, when thou didst burst upon
Iolcos, and our bravest shrunk aghast
From thy wild team of boars and lions, tame
To thee alone—their savage spirits quelled,
Made plastic to thy youthful vigor.

Adm. Nay,
Alkestis, 'twas the god's hand held the leash,
Not mine!

Alk. *With growing fervor.* But I, Admetus, knew that *thou*
Hadst come thus, seeking *me*! And *thee* I saw.
And then on Pheræ's throne I saw thee sit,
And I was proud to be thy consort, proud
To be the mother of thy children, who—
Sweet buds now bursting into bloom—will bear
Thy spirit and thy image, mixt with mine,
Down thro' the days of Hellas.

Adm. These are all
The god's works still, Alkestis!

Alk. *Baffled.* So they are!
I thank the god that he hath let me know
And love his works; for they have given to me
A life that fills my spirit to the brim,
And leaves no room for doubts or fears.

Adm. *Moved, but hardening himself.* A sweet
Content is thine, Alkestis, truly; fit
For woman's soul, not for the man's. Most blest
Palæmon is: the height of a great hope,
His at last for an instant, hath infixt
A splendor that is his for life! For life?
Who knows? That splendor may go with him down,
Even to the pit of Hades, there to light
His spirit thro' dim gardens of the dead!
Man must pursue his aspiration up—
Up to the last chill height, tho human ties
Be broken, and the earth become a blank,
As to Palæmon's sightless eyes. The gods
Are else most cruel, and their high Olympus
Is but a snare!

(*He wavers suddenly, and drops into a chair.*)

Ah, what is this? A pang,
Sudden and sharp—

Alk. O, art thou sick, my lord?

Adm.
It passes. What a sudden shock was that!
Thy hand upon my forehead—so. It's gone.—
What was I saying?

Alk. Think no more of that.

Palæmon's story hath—wilt thou lie down?

(The king yields to her persuasions, and lies back upon the couch, where Alkestis and Eurynome try to make him comfortable.)

Eurynome will sing, if that will please thee:
Her voice hath often brought the solace—there!

(Eurynome gets ready to sing. Palaemon enters, unattended, and remains for some time unobserved. The signal for the coming of Hermes is heard first in the distance, then nearer, then right at hand. It is not heard by any save those immediately concerned—the king and the queen; and when Hermes enters, he is not visible even to them, but they hear his voice and see the wreath of asphodel which he tosses down as a token. Eurynome is bewildered and dismayed by the conduct of the others. Palaemon waits tranquilly throughout.)

Adm. Hearing the note of Hermes faintly, and half rising.
What sound was that? *(The note again, nearer. Both listen intently.)* Again. Didst hear it?

Eurynome Ready—
What shall I sing, my lord?

Adm. Why did that sound
Shoot a strange weakness thro' my limbs, and numb
My spirit? *(The note a third time, now at hand.)*
Once again it comes! What now?

(His voice has sunk to a whisper. The two are on their knees, with intent faces toward the sound. Hermes appears, characteristically impudent.)

Hermes Admetus! King Admetus!

Adm. Hermes' voice!
What word from high Olympus dost thou bear
To me?

Hermes Admetus, king, prepare for death!
At noon this day thy spirit shall go hence!
Witness this token from Persephone.

(He tosses down a wreath of asphodel, from which Alkestis involuntarily shrinks. Admetus regards it not: the emergency has awakened his old defiant spirit, which has lately been dormant under an excess of piety. He rises indignantly.)

Adm.
Unword that summons! It is not for me!
Take thy curst token back! Admetus hath
A higher call: let Phœbus be my witness!

Hermes
Phœbus? Ho, ho! A higher call! Then hear
The last word of the *Fates!*

Adm. Overcome. The Fates! Alas,
I am undone! O Phœbus, what—

Hermes Thou call'st
On Phœbus: know that for thy piety
He hath made intercession with the Fates,
Who graciously have granted thee a respite,
Within thy choice. If any worthy soul
Will go, a willing ransom for thy soul,
At the appointed hour, thou still shalt live;
If not, thy spirit shall go hence with me.
The word is spoken and may not be changed!

(Hermes disappears. Admetus and Alkestis remain in suspense until they hear the Hermes note sounded faintly in the distance. Alkestis picks up and conceals the wreath of asphodel. She feels the sudden pang of the fatal sickness, but nerves herself. Admetus is still dazed by the sense of catastrophe, and recovers himself slowly, as the sickness leaves him. With clear purpose, the queen assumes control.)

Alk.

My lord, thy piety hath kept thee whole!
The land is filled with those who will be glad
To go as ransom for their king,—as is
A subject's simple duty.

Adm. Think'st thou so,
Alkestis?

Alk. 'Twould be treason in a king
To doubt it—treason to his faithful realm!
Thou knowest it is so.—O, thou shalt live
Long, and thy kingdom be a garden, where
The gods will walk with thee! And thou shalt see
Our sons victorious in war and peace,
As I saw thee; our daughters thou shalt give
To worthy heroes, that their days may be
Happy, as mine were.—Ah, Eurynome!

(*She half supports herself upon Eurynome. Admetus is regaining command of himself.*)

I see it all, my lord—what thou wilt do
And be, in plenteous days to come, on this
Good loyal earth.—I see in one quick flash,
As good Palæmon in an instant saw
His bliss complete, ere darkness overtook
His eyes.—Eurynome, now lead me hence—
I faint almost—with joy! Nay, stay thou here:
Thou hast thy work to do, Admetus!—Ah!
Phœbus hath succored thee indeed, for thou
Art pious: trust thy people for their part,
Since thou hast been a virtuous king. Nay, nay,—
'Twill soon be past! Eurynome will care
For me.

(*Admetus goes with her to the door, but she will not permit him to go farther.*)

Adm. How frail a vessel is the heart
Of woman—shattered now by fear, now joy.—
For me, I feel my vigor all returned;
And my blood bounds, as if the summons were
To life, not death! Ho there, without!

(*An attendant goes to summon the king's guard.*)

The time
Is short. Blessed be Phœbus; he once more
Hath steaded me in time. Now to my work.
The king's life appertains not to himself,
But to his realm. The chosen of the gods
Must heed their high call, whatsoe'er the cost!

(*The royal guards enter and form for orders. He scans the stalwart line with pride.*)

Who of these bravest men in Thessaly
Shall be my ransom?—Now, men, which of you
Will die to save his king?

(*Every sword flashes from its sheath, and the line steps forward with cries of "The King! The King!"*)

Nay, sheath your swords.
The foe that threatens him cannot be toucht
By arms, or fenced against by armor. He
Comes silently but surely, and demands
But one—today.—But no more riddling now!
At noon thy king must die! The fatal word
Is spoken. But if any worthy man
Will die, a willing ransom for the king,
The king shall live. Such grace hath been allowed.

(*He pauses briefly. The line remains unbroken.*)

Back to your places, men! I will not shame
Myself or you by waiting. (*They obey.*) Herald, go—
And blow a signal thro' the streets—

(*An attendant enters and speaks to Palaemon, privately.*)

Pal. The word
My lord, already hath gone forth, and one
Is come to say thy ransom hath been found
Within thy household.

Adm. Phœbus be praised again
Not for the king's life only; nay, much more,
That such devoted loyalty yet lives
In Pheræ! But I knew my life was whole.
The tide of health was coursing thro' my veins
Already.—Tell the man, whoe'er he be,
His noble sacrifice is registered
With gods who ne'er forget; and say to him
That royalty will do its uttermost
To dignify his deed, and all his kindred
Shall be ennobled in the state. His name
Shall be their lasting honor. See it done!

(*The attendant goes, Admetus summons another.*

The weighty matters on our mind today
Have caused us to neglect our noble guest,
Great Heracles. Go, bear our greeting to him,
And urge him at his will to meet us here.
Alkestis will be here, anon.

(*As the attendant goes, the king first takes note of Palaemon's presence.*)

Palæmon, thou?
And unattended? How—

Pal. Phœbus hath eyes
For me, and they are at thy service, king,—
Thou favored of the gods,—as faithfully
As mine were once!

Adm. Thou knowest all?

Pal. Aye, king:
A great deliverance is wrought. Be firm,
Once more, and let no mortal yearning step
Betwixt thee and Olympus!

Adm. Yet, once more?

Pal. The god is sure; but consummation still
Is thine to choose. (*Heracles enters.*)

Adm. Ah, friend, great Heracles!
The friend of man, indeed. This house hath oft
Been gladdened by thy coming,—never more
Than when thy shoulders, that before had borne
So many burdens, bore into this hall
Yon loved priest, blinded by the answer to
His lifelong prayer! But we have been remiss.
A king must be the subject of his realm,
Tho his own pleasure suffer. But our queen
Will join us soon, and we will make amends.

Heracles Heartily What are amends that are not made
already,—
In that I see thee well, and soon shall see
Thy gracious queen? For an unwelcome tale
Of illness of thyself or of the queen
Hath come to me.

Adm. 'Twas nothing, and is past
But let me tell thee what hath chanced. I know
Thou lovest noble deeds in others, as

Thou lovest to perform them. Here is one.
O Heracles, the messenger of Fate
Came to me in this room today!

Heracles What, Hermes?

Adm.
Hermes,—to lead my soul—thou knowest whither!

Heracles Thy soul?

Adm. Aye, and had Phœbus not prevailed
In my behalf, the king, who now in health
Recounts to thee—with shuddering—this tale,
Would be a dying man!

Heracles A marvel, truly!
What? Could the word of Phœbus bend the will
Of Fate?

Adm. Somehow the iron will of Fate
Was bent. A willing, worthy soul was askt,
As ransom for the king. What thinkest thou?
Would the king's faithful subjects let the king
Be taken in such strait? Thou seest that I
Am well,—and it is now the fatal hour.

Heracles O King Admetus, thou art doubly blest:
First, for thy favor with the gods; and then,
No less, that this, love's highest challenge, hath
Not rung in vain in Pheræ! Yet, as king
O'er such a subject, thou'rt no happier
Than is that subject, whose brave soul uprose
To save the king by such a deed! Therein,

Alone, may man outstrip the gods—that he
May die for love!

Adm. O noble Heracles!
I partly guess thy meaning. What is that?
(*A sound of the wailing of women is heard.*)
Is that the wailing for the soul that goes
As ransom for the king?

Heracles *Reverently.* For him should rise
A song of triumph, rather!

Attendant *Entering* The queen, my lord,
Is dying!

Adm. and Heracles The queen!

Att. The queen, my lord, is dying!

Adm. *Incredulous.*
That cannot be! She was but faint for joy!
(*There is a pause, in which Heracles divines all that has happened.*)

Heracles For joy, Admetus, she hath ransomed thee!
(*Admetus slowly realizes that even a woman might fulfil the terms of his ransom.*)

Adm.
I see it now: why saw I not before?
(*To the attendant.*)
Dying, thou said'st—not dead! Then this must stop!
Where—who can check this thing? O Phœbus, thou—

Pal. Patience, O King Admetus—this is now
Beyond the gods. Be resolute, my lord,
Once more, and then—

Adm. Palæmon, NO! Thou hast
No solace here! The bliss of all Olympus
Could never pay this loss!

(He is overcome with grief. Heracles lifts him to his feet and attendants come to his support.)

Heracles Lead him gently in.

(Admetus is led away, and is followed by Palaemon, also attended. Heracles resumes his seat. The wailing approaches, and the mourners enter, singing.)

Chorus

Life so fair, but fleeting, fleeting!
Gleam of morn, then changeless night.
Close upon the thrill of greeting
Comes the sob that ends delight.
Silence where the bird was singing—
Blooms the flower, in dust to fall;
For the careless Hours are winging
Death to each and all!

Heracles Is there naught to do but mourn?

Chorus

Every leaflet's idle flutter
Calls the reaper to the vale.
Red lips, with each word they utter,
Sooner must be husht and pale.
How the far-drawn billow crashes,
And is quencht along the shore!

As the morning dewdrop flashes
Once and nevermore.
O so queenly, radient, tender—
Must her graces light the grave?
Love, O Love, thou ruthless spender,
Is there nothing thou wouldst save?
Love, O Love, thou all-retrieving,
Death is won to thee at last!
Thine the triumph, ours the grieving,
Till all grief be past!

(*The mourners pass out. Heracles, who has been submergea in thought throughout the singing of the chorus, now rises, as if summoning himself to action.*)

Heracles O Father Zeus, thy help in one more task—
The greatest task of all! *Death shall not hold*
Alkestis! (*He pauses, as awaiting response.*)
Father Zeus, thy help—once more!

(*There is a sound of low thunder from Olympus. Heracles hears, lifts his face and his arms in acknowledgment, and goes out.*)

HERMES

THE FOURTH DAY

In spite of the special vision that has been granted him of the divine splendor of Apollo, Palaemon finds himself powerless in the presence of the bitter human bereavement of Admetus; who, no longer attracted by Olympian immortality, is now resolved to live his human life, and then to join Alkestis in the realm of shades. Heracles, about to depart on his Thracian quest, asks an audience of the king. He brings with him a woman, heavily shrouded, whom he has won, he says, at a wrestling match. As he cannot take her with him, he prevails upon Admetus to have her cared for in his palace. Looking upon her as she is led away, the king and his court are filled with poignant memories of Alkestis. Then Heracles tells Admetus how he has attempted to conquer Death, and how he has been granted a special revelation of the significance of death in human life, and how, finally, in recognition of the reconciliation of Admetus to his humanity, Death has voluntarily yielded up Alkestis; that she may do her appointed work with him for whom she was willing to die,

and that they two may live on together and be ready for the summons of Hermes, whensoever it may come. And when this marvelous story is told, and the king can no longer doubt that Alkestis lives once more, the day comes to its close. For the beautiful divinities that accompany the chariot of the sun-god now lead in the evening, and all mortal life yields in turn to the kindly ministrations of the night.

ACT IV

SCENE: As in Act I.

(Palaemon, blind and more decrepit than heretofore, enters, led by old Zethus, who shows for the priest the utmost solicitude, mixt, it may be, with some of the superstitious awe that the ignorant are likely to feel toward the insane or the specially afflicted.)

Zethus This is the way, good Palæmon. We are now before the temple, where thou didst desire to be. Canst thou really not see it? Why, 'tis as clear as the sun itself! To be blind is monstrous. Here the king will come, anon, to bid farewell to the great Heracles—Heracles, good Palæmon, he that bore thee from the field when thou wert stricken. Canst thou remember, being blind? He, he, he! *(A mirthless, merely habitual, cackle.)* Thou wert a wisp of corn in his hands—thou wert! He said he had carried a lion's carcass once. He, he, he!

Palaemon Is no one here?

Zet. No one.—Yet hold—yes, it is Heracles himself, coming hither along the Larissa road,—and he leads a woman by the hand. He is coming to meet the king before he goes on his way. There is the road, Palæmon—dost see? No, thou art blind, indeed! It is the road that leads to the tomb, and over it the funeral procession past this morning. Alack, it was very sad. *(He sighs, imagining that he is very sorrowful.)* They say she died to save the king, and now he grieves mightily.—A cruel stroke it is, Palæmon, that thou shouldst be blind, when

there is so much to see. How is it, indeed, with a man who cannot see? Can he, in very truth, see nothing? Is it always black night, with neither stars nor moon, when one is blind? Can one live so?

Pal. *Patiently, and rather to himself than to Zethus.* Nay, nay! All is light, yet is nothing seen that others see.—Yet now I see a dead queen and a mourning king!

Zet. That cannot be! The queen is in the tomb and the king is not here. What else canst thou see, good Palæmon? He, he, he!

Pal. *As before.* Only the splendor of the god!

Zet. Only the splendor of the god! Alack, thou art beside thyself. I see no god, tho my eyes are sound. I never saw a god, unless it were that madcap youth that used to sit upon a rock, or lean against a laurel, and sing "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo," like a silly bird,—with his fingers twiddling on a piece of wood! He, he, he, he, he!

Pal. No, thy world hath no place for gods.

Zet. *Complacently.* Truly not. With sheep for wool and meat, and a field where I may dig stones and plant barley, and a place to sleep when night comes, I care not,—but I may not speak thus, for they say that the gods are easily angered. Can they hear us when we talk together, thus?

Pal. They may be otherwise engaged.

Zet. Truly. (*He speaks as he might in the presence of an infant or an imbecile.*) Poor old man! He, he, he! He sees Alkestis,

and cannot see the road to her tomb; he sees the king, when the king is not here; he sees "the splendor of the god," and he cannot see me! He, he, he! How foolish a man is when he hath lost his wit! And to such a pass we may all come: he was a good shepherd once. (*To Palaemon.*) But thou hast missed much in being blind, Palæmon,—'tis a brave sight: all the people in a procession, and the king grieving for the queen who hath died for him.

Pal. And will the king come here?

Zet. Anon.

Pal. *Speaking regretfully to himself.* I must not stay to meet him. I have spoken to him already, as best I might—or rather Phœbus hath spoken thro' me,—and 'twas of no avail. May the Fates deal kindly with him, since the god cannot change his will! Where is the temple?

Zet. Why, right before thee! But thou art indeed blind!

(*Palaemon raises his arms and his face toward the temple in silent supplicati§. Meanwhile, Heracles, leading a woman who is completely shrouded and veiled, approaches. He conducts her to a seat beside one of the pillars of the portico.*)

Pal. Now, lead me away.

Zet. Whither, good Palæmon?

(*Heracles strides forward and greets Palaemon affectionately.*)

Heracles

What, good old priest! A priest thou art, indeed!
The god of light shines thro' thee, tho thine eyes
Are darkened. But—thou comest from the king:
How didst thou leave him?

Pal. Changed, O Heracles!
His foot was on the ladder to Olympus;
But now he turns him from the skies, and vows
To bide his mortal time, and then to seek
Alkestis in the gardens of the dead!
Thou only, Heracles, who art the son
Of Zeus, and yet the earth-tried friend of man,
Canst help him now. No priest avails, no dream
Of immortality, away from her,
Can lift his eyes again to the great boon
That Phœbus and the dear one whom he mourns
Have won for him so hardly!

Heracles Patience, priest:
The highest powers that sway are in this cause
Enlisted with the king. Have faith that all
May yet be well with him.

Pal. Thy strong right arm
Is in thy words. Farewell! (*To Zethus*)
Now, lead me on—
Down the Larissa road—toward the tomb.

Zet. This way, Palæmon! Canst thou not see?
(*The priest stumbles.*)
No, thou art blind, indeed! This way.
(*Heracles goes with them a few steps, bidding farewell; then turns, and finds himself face to face with Apollo.*)

Apo. Brother, how now? What marvel hast thou wrought
Today?
(*He points to the woman, who is unconscious of his presence.*)

Heracles *Gravely.* I know not.

Apo. What, thou knowest not
The import of thy deed?

Heracles Not when 'tis done
For man.

Apo. Oho! Then thou, the friend of man,
Art balked by this same riddle! I, a god,
Have dwelt with man and learned to love him well—
Finding a novel joy in serving him;
And yet, some monster of perversity
Resides within his flesh, and brings to naught
My labors.

Heracles Canst thou—die?

Apo. What meanest thou?
The gods cannot know death!

Heracles Nay, they are "doomed
To immortality"—I learned the phrase
Today. But man knows life and death: he dwells
Within the mystery about which thou
Art only curious. Wouldst thou know his will,
Thou must know death as well as life.

Apo. Indeed!
Too high a price for mere simplicity!

Heracles
Too high a price for any *god* to pay.

Apo. A son of Zeus hath caught the human trick

Of answering one riddle with another!—
Then, Heracles, it seems that each must be
Content with his own work: thus, I with mine;
With his, Admetus.

Heracles Heracles with his.

Apo. Farewell! The king is coming. Would that I
Might prove my friendship as thou provest thine.—
And yet I would not rob thee of the joy!

(He goes out as Admetus, with all the tokens and bearing of a strong man in deep grief, enters, attended by household and courtiers. Music, elegiac in character, sounds while all take their places. Heracles drops on one knee to greet the king; then stands beside the shrouded woman and gravely waits for silence. His bearing in the ensuing dialogue is not that of one who is conciously conferring a great benefit. Rather, he seems as one who has just received a marvelously penetrating and inspiring revelation, and who is at once sobered and lifted up thereby.)

Heracles Earnestly
Admetus, king of Pheræ, I have askt
This meeting, since with early morn I go
On urgent labor to distant land;
And in thine hour of grief, by wondrous chance,
A message of high moment hath been sent
To thee. I am its bearer, and I crave
Thy audience while I unfold a tale
Of wonder that shall yield the sweetness forth,
Out of the bitter heart of thy great grief.

Admetus
O Heracles, if thou hast aught to say
To mitigate the sorrow, or to dull
A single accent or a glance of eye
From all the past that lives so poignantly

Within my heart, then spare thy speech. No drop
In all the brimming vessel of regret,
But has for me a sweetness far more dear
Than aught that life now holds. A future void
Of life may not destroy a past that lives.
Only Alkestis living at my side
Can take away Alkestis as she was.—
(He seats himself.)
But O, my friend,—the friend of all who need,—
So little can we guess of all that thou
Hast in thy heart and in thy might for man,
That we must hear thy tale, as if it were
The growth of our own longings into speech!

Heracles
Thou wilt be glad of it, O king. But first
I ask a simple favor at thy hand.
(He leads the shrouded woman before the king.)
I won this maiden at a wrestling match,
Today. Thou know'st she cannot go with me
On my far Thracian quest. I therefore ask
That she may be protected in thy palace
Till my return.

Adm. Within my palace, friend?
The palace of Admetus is not fit—

Heracles. Sharply.
What, dost thou hesitate, Admetus, now,
To grant a simple favor?—

Adm. Pardon, Heracles!
Pheræ has nothing thou canst not command.

Heracles Must Heracles command a favor?

Adm. Nay,
Bear with me friend, or rather with my grief—
But as she stands with thee, I seem to see
Alkestis!

Heracles. It hath come to pass, Admetus,
That every woman whom thou seest will call
The loved one to thy mind.

Adm. No, Heracles,
The earth holds none like her. And were she here,
In very truth, we two would live our days
Rejoicing, while the light should last, and pray
That Hermes, call might come to both at once,
And find us ready. Now I sit alone,
Biding a few brief years, till I shall go,
Serenely glad to seek her in the shades.

Heracles
Thy grief hath made thee wild!

Adm. Not wild, my friend;
My mind hath given judgment: better one
Brief day with her beside me, as she was,
That we might be united so in fate,
Than the chill, endless glory of Olympus.—

Heracles
But thou wilt keep this maid?

Adm. Eurynome,
Lead her within; care for her as befits
Her noble master.

(Eurynome approaches the shrouded figure, then shrinks. Heracles, watchful, puts up his hand in warning.)

Heracles To Eurynome. Go before, and speak
No word to her! To-morrow she will be
Herself once more.

(The woman follows Eurynome out. All gaze at her with curious fascination. Admetus almost rises from his seat; then sinks back, as if realizing that he is victim of an illusion. He resigns himself. His mood is reflected by the song.)

Song

From some far world above,
There drifted into mine
A spirit divinely fair;
And she blinded my eye with her hair—
She prest her lips to mine—
And that was love!

A murmur, a whispered prayer—
A breathing of wings that past:
With eyelids wide to the night,
I strove to trace that flight;
But the silent spaces, vast,
Were chill and bare.

The morn returns to the streams:
My vision comes not again;
But from deeper wells of the sky
Flow the days, and the memory
Of a bliss that was lost in pain
Is dearer than dreams.

(*Heracles stands waiting till the king rouses himself from his mood.*)

Adm.

We keep thee waiting, friend: the flesh is weak.

Heracles *Gravely, and with conviction.*

In weaknes is its strength. This have I learned
Today, Admetus. 'Twill be easier for thee
To get the meaning of the tale I bring.—
A few hours since, when thou wert bowed beneath
The first stroke of thy grief, I prayed to Zeus
For aid in a presumptuous enterprize—

Adm.

Presumptuous? To the might of Heracles,
Is any enterprize presumptuous?

Heracles

For such a task the strength of arm avails
Nothing. My folly thou wilt see, O king,
For thou art man. I tell thee, sudden wrath
At thy despoiling filled my soul with fire!
I would go seek the spoiler,—him that comes,
Hiding his cruel purpose in the dark.
This arm, that oft hath hurled the foes of man
To Death and Tartarus, would now meet Death,
The spoiler, in his hour of victory,
And wrest from him the prey—would bring Alkestis
Back to her lord!

Adm. O Heracles, no blame
Is thine for failure of that high resolve!

Heracles

Nay, but thou wilt be glad when thou hast heard
What chanced.—
Where should I find this enemy?
I pictured the grim monster, gloating o'er
His latest victim. Thro' the night I stood
Beside yon doorway, watching: he came not.
In early morn I walkt with those that bore
The beauteous body to the sepulcher
On the Larissa road. And when the throng
Departed, and the sounds of mourning died,
I sat alone beside the silent tomb,
And waited long, in vain. And when it seemed
That I must seek the lost one in the far
Sad garden of Persephone,—

Adm. My friend!
So far wouldst thou have gone?

Heracles *Bowing.* —then suddenly
It seemed a presence stood beside the door,
And slowly grew into a woman's form—
Mantled in gray, with wreath of asphodel
About the marble beauty of her brow.
And ere my lips could frame an utterance,
A voice, so lowly musical it seemed
To grow within me, said, "O, son of Zeus,
The love that holds thee to thy strange intent
Constrains me to reveal myself to thee;
And as man's helper thou deservest, too,
That thou shouldst know what every man must
learn."

"And who art thou?" I askt. She answered,
"Death."
At that dread name my wrath flamed up within:
I cried, "Then hope not with so fair a form,
To shield so foul a monster!" and I sprang,
And would have grappled with her. As I rose,
My eyes met hers.—
Such lustrous, level eyes—
They held mine—gazing—till I seemed to see
Sunrise and sunset mingling at some far
Faint margin of illimitable sea.—
And then—I knew not that my hands had dropt—

Adm.
Ah, mighty Heracles, mighty in love
Of man, and mighty in thy arm—alas!
Not even thou canst quell—

Heracles Not so, O king!
'Twas nothing grim or terrible that broke
These battle-tested sinews. 'Twas the deep
Calm beauty of those wondrous eyes, that showed
World beyond world, all luminous with love.—

Adm.
Beauty—and love!

Heracles Aye, king, beauty and love!
Weigh well those words; their meanings learn anew:
Learn what it is that thou hast shunned in fear!
She who in beauty died for love of thee
Hath earned the right to teach thee.

Adm. Aye, Alkestis.
Already she hath taught me much. Go on.

Heracles
Then mark me well: the tale affects thee nearly.—
Unmanned thus strangely, not a blow received
Or given, unwittingly I lost myself,
And lookt into the level eyes of Death;
Until—it may be that I swooned away,
But this I know: my purpose was forgot;
The vigor which a thousand victories
Had stored within my arms was all forgot;
The glory of Olympus and its gods—
Even great Father Zeus,—this kindly earth,
With all its sunny toil and starlit rest—
All were as if they ne'er had been.—
That tomb,
It seemed, was but a gateway, now flung wide,
And I was gazing thro', into a world
Miraculous as that which good Palæmon
Sees thro' his blindness. Yet 'twas but *this* world;
For some strange sense was suddenly unsealed
Within me, and my spirit leapt to meet
The miracles that live within this earth!
I heard a bird's song; and within—beyond,
Were all the songs that birds have ever sung.
I heard a child's laugh—just a happy rill,
That told me how a wondrous stream of joy
Comes rippling down the human centuries.
I pluckt a flower, and in its silken folds
The marvel of its beauty lay revealed.
A million cups, like this, had filled themselves
With sunlight to the brim; and every one

Had claspt its treasure unto life and death,
To make this beauty—dying in my hand.
The fragrance drew my spirit back thro' fields
And garden-plots uncounted, where the winds
Of long-dead summers played, and elements
Climbed grossly from the soil, to lose themselves
In the soft distillation that would mix
Their souls with beauty—for a summer's morn.—
But I must not too long withhold thy joy:
I may not tell thee all that I perceived
Thro' that new sense that laid the husk aside.
All was of wondrous import, for I saw
That earth would not be earth, if Death were not;
That man would not be man, if Death were not;
That life would not be life, if Death were not;
That all the beauty and the melody
Are molded and attuned in every way
By those two friends—co-workers—Life and Death!
And then I knew how she that loveth life
Must give her life most freely—such a gift,
And such a consecration as the gods
May by no means aspire to, being doomed
To immortality.
At last I woke
From my deep dream. My eyes were freed once more:
I saw the gray stone of the sepulcher,
And that gray figure standing by the door,
And heard her voice's music once again.
She said, "The vision I have granted thee
Is sealed unto the gods. Thou, Heracles,
Altho immortal, art allied to man,
In sympathy and thro' Alcmene's pain;

And thou hast earned the right to know this thing:
Man's love, man's will,—the strangely blended twain
That make him man,—would vanish, were it not
That life and death are mingled in his blood.
To woman comes this knowledge easily,
And she must be man's teacher."

Adm. *Thoughtfully* Death was right;
Her words are echoes of the lesson taught
By one who pluckt the fatal asphodel—
Would she were here to—

Heracles Patience, yet awhile,
Admetus, and thou shalt rejoice.

Adm. Rejoice?
A strange word in Admetus' ears, my friend!

Heracles Prepare to hear strange words, Admetus; I
Have yet the greatest marvel to unfold.
Pardon thy friend for holding thee thus long:
'Twas needful thou shouldst hear the tale at length—
Nay, patience!
After Death had spoken thus,
She paused and smiled, and then again she spoke:
"Admetus hath been much beguiled of late
By those who serve the Fates, not knowing me.
Now is he changed, and shuns no more his lot;
And since he needs Alkestis, and since she
Hath taught him now the law of love and death,
She shall go back with thee to him."

Adm. *Incredulous* What may
This mean?

Heracles Alkestis is restored to thee!
Thy heart was right, O king, she stood but now
Within thy presence! (*Then, in stern command, as Admetus starts from his seat*) Nay, go not to her!

Adm. *Falling back in wonder*
'Tis Zeus, the father, speaking thro' his son!
What is thy will? What may a mortal do?

Heracles
Alkestis lives for thee, as once she died
For thee, O king! From deepest consecration,
The deepest that the Fates allow, she comes,
With difficulty, back unto the light
Of this world's day. To-morrow thou shalt go
And greet her,—not today! Prepare thyself,
Meanwhile, for the dear life which thou shalt lead
With her, in this thy happy realm, until
The voice of Hermes summons thee again.

Adm. *As if in a dream.*
She lives—again? Alkestis?

Heracles Alkestis lives
Again!
(*Admetus, over-awed, sits meditating. The chorus goes out, singing.*)

Chorus
O the Day is a loom where the God doth weave,
A wondrous loom is the Day!

And the gleaming web is the life we leave,
It gleams with our work and play.
The flash of the shuttle, the quick return—
Doth the weaver smile as he sees?
We may love and hold, we may love and mourn;
But what doth the weaver please?

O the Day is a harp to the God's swift hand,
A wondrous harp is the Day!
Its tones are the noises of sea and land,
And strange is the harper's lay.
From the God's swift hand fly the sweet, wild chords—
From the God's swift hand they fly!
O the music we love, but we know not the words
That he sings as he passes by!

(Admetus decends from his seat as the chorus disappears, and would throw himself at the feet of Heracles, who checks him, and leading him away, exchanges gravely affectionate farewells with him. As soon as Heracles is alone, the note of Hermes is heard.)

Heracles Hermes! What message can he bring?
(Hermes enters, fresh and debonair.)

Hermes Well, brother, thou hast stept aside from the prescribed path, to perform an unexpected labor.

Heracles Whither leads the prescribed path, if not to the unexpected labor?

Hermes Ho, ho! riddling again! But spare my wit: I come from Hera.

Heracles What new command from the queen of heaven?

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Hermes She reminds thee that thy Thracian task is yet untoucht.

Heracles Tell her that I go directly. These hands desire no better sport than curbing the wild horses of the north!

(*He takes up his club, adjusts his lionskin, and starts.*)

Hermes Farewell, O son of Zeus and Alcmene!

Heracles Farewell!

(*Hermes remains on the stage, which is gradually filling with the associates of Apollo—now forming an Evening Chorus. The fading glow of sunset is the light.*)

Chorus

The Day is gone! The breeze that stirred the meadow
Waves its last signal from the tree-top's height;
And, passing into earth's benignant shadow,
All mortal life must leave this world of light.
The Day is gone! The cloud-hosts westward marching,
In flusht ranks pause above the sunken flame;
Their shadows strike across the sky's faint arching,
And softly close the gates whence morning came.

The Day is gone! The doves are homeward plaining—
Noon's wandering life returns to evening's fold.
The Day is gone! The sunset glow is waning;
On mountain peaks the dusk hath dimmed the gold.
O, fill thine eyes that die with light immortal,
Once more, O man, then dream thyself to sleep!
The Day hath past beyond the western portal—
The chariot-throne speeds onward thro' the deep!

(*The divine Chorus of Evening gradually disapears, the Winds lingering about the pillars to the last. Then Hermes, at the center, vanishes.*)

YC 67742

395517

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY